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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001151

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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TAGS: PGOV KDEM NI

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: MOVES TO CREATE NEW OPPOSITION PARTY

REF: ABUJA 779

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: Poloff met May 17, 28 and 29 with politicos who claim that members of various opposition parties and disaffected members of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are planning to join forces and attempt to create a new opposition party to confront the PDP. Though the allegedly soon-to-be-announced "new" party includes PDP members, it appears largely built around associates of former Vice President and Action Congress (AC) presidential candidate Atiku Abubakar, and may simply be a way for the AC to repackage itself. Former Senator Pius Anyim (PDP) (strictly protect) confirmed attempts to develop a new party, though doubted it would succeed, in part because Atiku would insist on leading it. Given Nigeria's godfather system of politics, we remain skeptical that this new party will succeed in unifying the opposition (particularly under Atiku's leadership) to effectively challenge the PDP. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Former Senator and 2007 AC Vice Presidential candidate Ben Ndi Obi (strictly protect) told Poloffs May 17 that he is part of an effort to establish a new political party to challenge the People's Democratic Party for power. He claimed several well regarded founding members of the PDP were also involved, and that former Senate President Ken Nnamani would be the figurehead party leader. (NOTE: This generally concurs with what Atiku and his surrogates have told us before. END NOTE). Obi maintained that he would not accept a leadership position in the new party because he did not want it to be characterized as merely an AC initiative.

¶13. (C) Former Senate President Pius Anyim told PolOff May 28 that he was aware of plans to create this new opposition party, but doubted it will succeed. Anyim asserted that Nnamani is "way out in front of people" on the issue of a "new" party, which he characterized as largely an Atiku creation. Given Atiku's strong personality, Anyim felt he would refuse to take a backseat to Nnamani (or anyone else). For this reason, Anyim contended the proposed new party will likely not gain the broad following it seeks, since the ambitions of other "big men" would prevent them from joining it.

¶14. (C) On May 29, longtime embassy contact and political activist Daniel Richard, Anyim's erstwhile (and now estranged) political ally, rejected Anyim's negative view of

the proposed new party's chances. Richard contended the effort was being initiated by disaffected members of the PDP (including some PDP founders), in particular those who had supported Anyim's recent bid for PDP National Chairman, a campaign for which Richard traveled nationwide with Anyim as an unofficial campaign manager. Richard contended that former President Obasanjo's continued tenure as Chairman of the PDP Board of Trustees was blocking efforts to bring disaffected members (many of whom had left or been driven out under his leadership) back into the PDP, and was pushing some of them toward the proposed new opposition party. Richard claimed Anyim was wrong to assert that Atiku was behind the proposed new party, maintaining that all principals discussing the concept had agreed to contribute (or raise) equal amounts of money to prevent the emergence of a dominant individual. Richard commented "If this was solely an Atiku effort, I wouldn't be involved," and further told Poloff that an organizational meeting would be held June 15 in Kano, with a public launch of the party sometime thereafter. (NOTE: Richard's comment notwithstanding, Atiku has made clear in his own conversations with us that he sees himself as first among supposed equals in the new endeavor. END NOTE).

¶15. (C) In addition, Richard claimed All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) Presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari is also interested in a more unified opposition party, but will not make a decision about any potential involvement until after the Supreme Court issues its final verdict on the 2007 elections. Richard cited the following individuals as being involved with the proposed new political party (in addition to himself):

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-- Atiku Abubakar, former VP and 2007 AC presidential candidate;
-- Ben Obi, former Senator and 2007 VP running mate to Atiku Abubakar;
-- Abubakar Rimi, member of AC party and Atiku's 2007 campaign, also founding member of PDP and former executive governor of the Kano State (returned to PDP following 2007 elections);
-- Ken Nnamani, former Senate President;
-- Umar Ghali Na'Abba, former Speaker of the House of Representatives, who decamped to AC party for 2007 elections, but has since returned to PDP;
-- Aminu Bello Masari, former Speaker of the House of Representatives (PDP);
-- Balarabe Musa, Chairman of the People's Redemption Party and Chair of the Conference of Nigerian Political Parties;
-- Adams Oshiomole, immediate past President of the Nigerian Labor Congress and Governor-in-waiting of Edo State (as announced by election tribunal) (Labour Party);
-- Bola Tinubu, former Governor of Lagos State (AC);
-- Usman Bugaje, former member of the National Assembly and 2007 Katsina gubernatorial candidate (AC).

¶16. (C) COMMENT: The current discussion of a unified opposition party to challenge the dominance of the PDP appears to be coming mostly from inside the Atiku camp. Even several of those listed as "disgruntled PDP members" are persons who left the PDP with Atiku and switched to the AC for the 2007 elections, but have since then returned to the ruling PDP party. Previous efforts in 2007 to create a unified opposition party failed because of the rival leaders' inability to agree on who would get the top spot. Attempts last year to bring the ANPP's Buhari and AC's Atiku together foundered on just this point. Underlying this failure is the very nature of Nigerian politics, which is largely designed to control the distribution of wealth and power among rival godfather networks, a role dominated in all but a few areas of the country by the PDP. For a single new opposition party to coalesce would require not only for a number of "big men" to subsume their own ambitions under one leader, but also for them to believe they have a serious chance to supplant the PDP at the top of the political pyramid, a very

tall order indeed. In Nigeria, there are few if any rewards
for coming in second. END COMMENT.
SANDERS